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AUTHOR Ducharme, Edward R.
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ABSTRACT

Little is known about "teacher educators," the higher education faculty responsible for teacher preparation. Reasons include the lack of a definition and consequent difficulty in identifying the population, scarcity of research on teacher educators specifically, and inclusion of teacher educators in research on the education professoriate generally. This digest describes the definitional problem, summarizes information from education professoriate research, and suggests needed research. (AA)

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TEACHER EDUCATORS: WHAT DO WE KNOW?

ERIC Digest #15

Edward R. Ducharme

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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CLEARINGHOUSE ON TEACHER EDUCATION

ERIC DIGEST 15

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Teacher Educators: What Do We Know?

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Problems of Definition

For some, the term teacher educator includes all who instruct prospective and practicing teachers from the instructor of freshman composition to the instructor of learning theory. For others, the term includes only instructors of professional teacher education courses such as methods of teaching reading. A rationale for the first is that all teacher education students take more than half of their coursework with arts and sciences faculty (Kluender 1984). Yet nearly all these faculty do "teacher education" work only because some of their students are from teacher education programs. Arts and sciencies faculty are not subject to review by the school, college, or department of education at the institution in which they teach. They do not view themselves as teacher educators, but rather as professors in academic disciplines.

The second definition has the advantage of including only those who provide professional coursework and experiences for teacher education students. The disadvantage is that, except in rare instances (Carter 1981; Carter 1984), researchers have not singled out this population for study. In her 1984 chapter, Carter limited her sample "to universally-based teacher educators who hold faculty appointments within the schools, colleges, or departments of education." Few studies have had such a clearly delimited population. Unfortunately, for purposes of wide applications of her work, Carter had only 28 subjects.

There has been considerable recent research on the education professoriate, a population that includes most of those providing professional teacher education. But the population also includes educational researchers and those who teach educational measurement and statistics at the graduate level, educational administration courses for school principals, and guidance and counseling courses for the school psychologist. While inferences about teacher educators are drawn from studies of education faculty, some question the validity of these inferences.

Profiles of the Education Professoriate

Professors of education are caught between the traditional scholarship and research norms of higher education and the professional and technical demands of practitioners. Campus colleagues may see them as pragmatic, unscholarly, and service-oriented, "anti-intellectuals in the house of intellect," while teachers in the public schools may see them as aloof and academic (Ducharme and Agne 1982).

Recent descriptions of the education professoriate include Wisniewski's (1986) portrait of the "ideal professor of education" and Ducharme and Agne's (1982) stereotypes (Ivory Tower, Schoolteacher, Non-Academic) emerging from their study of 340 professors in diverse institutions. Ducharme (1985) later elaborated to include five profiles of education faculty: the schoolperson who values practical experience in the lower school over involvement in higher education; the scholar who deprecates lower school experience in favor of academic pursuits and campus activities; the researcher with minimal lower school experience and an accompanying disdain for practical studies; the methodologist committed to linking theory and practice; and the "visitor to a strange planet," ambivalent about both the lower schools and higher education, unsure of self and role in the institution.

The varied types of institutions in which education faculty serve complicate the problem of generalizing research findings. Gideonse (1983) described the range as " . . . public and private (some church-related) large and small, single purpose or multipurpose, urban, rural, and in between, baccalaureate, graduate, or both, almost exclusively oriented toward research or engaging in none at all."

Status: Perceptions and Scholarship

Unanimity exists on the low esteem of the education professoriate in the academic community. Lanier and Little (1986) hypothesize that low scholarship productivity causes the low status, a situation they attribute to lower middle class, often anti-intellectual origins of many education faculty. They portray education faculty as conformist and inflexible.

Others see a different picture of education faculty scholarship. Wisniewski (1986) contends that education faculty merely reflect the relatively low scholarly output of all higher education groups. Ducharme and Agne (1982) report the publication rate of the 340 education faculty in their study as comparable to that of higher education faculty in general.

Academic Preparation

Education faculty are likely to have bachelors degrees in fields other than education, generally in a traditional content area such as English, history, or mathematics. They have attended more than one graduate institution for advanced degree work and acquired their doctoral degrees at a slightly later age than colleagues in other academic units, often on a part-time basis (Carter 1981; Ducharme and Agne 1982). Once they were somewhat less likely to possess the doctorate than faculty in other departments, but now they are as likely or more likely to have the degree.

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Attitudes Toward Responsibilities

Education professors are like their counterparts throughout higher education in their preference for teaching and related tasks such as advising and in the proportion of time allotted to the activities. Ducharme and Agne (1982) found professors of education devoted substantial time, energy, and commitment to these activities. Teaching was the first priority of more than 65 percent of the faculty, a preference they did not think characterized their institutions' priorities. Boyer (1986) reports that even in research universities, 40 percent of faculty prefer teaching to research.

Professors of education often maintain their connections with the public schools. More than 70 percent have had previous full-time public school positions (Carter 1984; Ducharme and Agne 1982), and more than 60 percent reported consultative relationships with the schools in a two-year period.

Conclusions and Research Directions

Most of the knowledge about teacher educators is inferred from research on the education professoriate broadly defined. Too many generalizations about teacher educators are made from this broad research base. There is a need to narrow the research population to teacher educators, which necessitates a workable definition. In any study, discussion, or publication about teacher educators, it is important to maintain precision in terminology.

Once a satisfactory definition is achieved, research outlined by Troyer (1986) should follow. She suggests studying abilities, values and attitudes, characteristics, expectations, and work activities; roles, difficulties, strengths and weaknesses; the influence of faculty involvement in research on teacher education programs; relationships with the university and faculty in other departments; and success in teaching effective classroom teaching behaviors to teacher candidates.

— Edward R. Ducharme

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Many of the following references—those identified with an EJ or ED number—have been abstracted and are in the ERIC database. The journal articles should be available at most research libraries. The documents (citations with an ED number) are available on microfiche in ERIC microfiche collections at more than 700 locations. Documents also can be ordered through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service. Call (800) 227-3742 for price and order information. For a list of ERIC collections in your area or for information on submitting documents to ERIC, contact the ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 610, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 293-2450.

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